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## AVAILABILITY AND UTILIZATION OF REFERENCE SOURCES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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# **AVAILABILITY AND UTILIZATION OF REFERENCE SOURCES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES**

By

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## *Abstract*

*The study investigates availability and utilization of reference sources in academic libraries in Nigeria. It is undertaken as a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study is post graduate students in University of Port Harcourt, totalling 1,264. The simple random sampling technique was used to select the sample. The sample size is (118) post graduate students. Validation of the instrument was done by experts in guidance and counselling department. The reliability was done using cronbach alpha with reliability coefficient of 0.80. The researcher and two trained research assistants distributed the instruments. Mean (x) and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions while the z test was used to answer the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that there is a significant difference between availability and utilization of reference sources in academic libraries. In conclusion all reference sources are available but not up to date and underutilized. The reference librarians need to create awareness of availability of reference sources and guide students for maximum utilization. It was recommended among others that librarians regularly update reference sources in order to make them relevant at all times.*

**Keywords:** Reference, Sources, Availability, Utilization, Academic, Libraries

## Introduction

Reference sources are goldmine of the reference section their value is inestimable to users who need them to obtain relevant information Abudulahi and Manze (2014). They are very important tools needed for proper functioning of academic libraries. Libraries acquire information resources, organize the resources for easy retrieval and dissemination of information. The provision of reference services seeks to fulfil the greater mission of the library by helping users to convincingly access and use information through reference sources in the library.

According to Ifeka, Oghenetega, Nwabu(2013) asserts the importance of reference sources as it provides a good introduction to a topic, brief factual information, summaries and clarify issues, define unfamiliar terms and identify additional relevant sources such as books and periodicals and titles. They are to be consulted for definite items of information rather than to be read consecutively. In most libraries reference sources do not circulate they are located in a separate reference section. This practice makes them readily accessible. They provide background information or direct one to additional sources.

Gaur (2013) asserts that reference sources is grouped into three categories primary, secondary and tertiary sources. The primary sources of information are more current and up-to-date than other sources of information. These includes journals, articles, technical reports etc. Secondary sources interprets and rearrange primary sources in other to satisfy the information needs of users, they include, indexes, abstract and bibliographies. Tertiary sources are produced after the filtration of primary and secondary sources. They are dictionaries, encyclopedia's, biographies, yearbooks, handbooks, fact books, almanac, maps, atlases, manuals etc.

However, for there to be an effective reference service delivery there must be sound and quality reference collections. According to Agidahun(2004) a library that cannot meet the information needs of its users is **moribond and anaemic** in information system because it has lost its vitality, honour and attraction. Hence, libraries should ensure that they provide adequate and relevant sources in order to meet the information needs of users.

Furthermore, most academic libraries in Nigeria fails to adequately provide for their users probably because of poor funding, poor acquisition of reference sources, and low utilization of available reference sources. Therefore this study attempt to examine the availability and utilization of reference sources in academic libraries.

## Statement of the Problem

Reference sources are very important tools that assist library users in terms of information search. It makes access to large information resources easy and less cumbersome to users. Despite the relevance of these reference sources to library users, most academic libraries finds it very difficult

to provide adequate and satisfying services to their users, could this be as a result of lack of awareness that such references are available and their relevance to the users, inappropriate evaluation of reference sources and poor utilization of the available reference sources by library users. It is against this backdrop the researcher decided to carry out this study availability and utilization of reference sources in academic libraries and also to proffer possible solutions.

### **Objective of the Study**

The aim of the study is to investigate availability and utilization of reference sources in academic libraries.

1. To ascertain the levels of availability and utilization of reference sources in academic libraries.
2. To determine how often the reference sources are utilized in academic libraries.
3. To examine the challenges encountered by students when consulting reference sources in academic libraries.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the levels of availability and utilization of reference sources in academic libraries?
2. How often are the reference sources utilized in academic libraries?
3. What are the challenges encountered when consulting reference sources in academic libraries?

### **Hypotheses**

1. There is no significant difference between the mean(x) scores of the level of availability and utilization of reference sources in academic libraries.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean (x) scores of often consulted reference sources utilized in academic libraries.
3. There is no significant differences between the mean (x) scores of the challenges encountered while consulting reference sources and utilization in academic libraries.

### **Literature Review**

Reference sources is a variety of information organized for quick and convenient use. They are materials of information that are used for answering inquiries in libraries. These materials are not normally lent but consulted only on the premises. According to Iroaganachi and Ilogho (2012) the use of reference sources is very beneficial to achieve student's educational outcome. This is because they contain information that are accurate and reliable. Reference sources assist patrons to access information quickly. According to Okunade (2016) reference sources are specially compiled to provide answers to any type of queries that might be raised by the use of the library. This however will help in improving the academic performance of the user. Oyedum (2005) stated

that reference sources are designed for the treatment of its subject matters to be consulted for definite items of information rather than to be read consecutively.

Elmer (2009) opined that reference sources such as dictionaries, encyclopedia, almanac, atlases, are research tools that can help in writing paper and project. Also Ifafesobi (2005) stated that reference sources are information in the library regardless of their formats, whether in print or non-print. It can be used to provide relevant answer to divergent information needs of the user. Also Guar (2013) asserts that reference sources allow information to flow efficiently from information sources to information seekers. Also Usman (2005) stated that “where libraries are established, they are not supplied with books, not even daily newspapers are seen there”. That is to say adequacy and non-availability of reference sources can deter students from using the resources.

Ogbuiyi (2015) examine a study on availability and use of reference sources and services in Babcock University Library. The study revealed that reference sources are highly available, accessible and adequate, except year books, bibliographies and biographies that are not available, accessible and adequate.

Ademodi (2015) conducted a study on awareness and use of reference sources by undergraduates in Adekunle Ajasin University Library. The findings revealed that majority of the undergraduate students are aware of reference sources, however the rate of use of reference sources, is significantly low.

Onifade and Sowole (2011) conducted a study on the use of reference sources by undergraduates, the study revealed that encyclopedia and dictionaries are mostly used by students. Also Sohail et al (2013) in his study of use of library resources by students in University of Kalyani, revealed that guidance in the use of library resources and services are necessary help to students to meet their information needs.

Motiang, Walis and Karodia (2014) evaluated the resources and services provision and ascertain the satisfaction derived by users of the university user of the University of South African Library. The study revealed significant use of the library, its resources and services and were satisfied with the library operating hours, registration process and staff members. Areas that needed attention includes increase in book and journal collection and internet services.

Ogunniyi, Efosa and Sheyi (2013) studied the use of reference sources by students in Adeyemi College of Education. The study found out that majority of library users have good understanding of what reference sources are and that encyclopedias and dictionaries have higher rates of usage than other reference sources in the library. The scholars also asserts that patrons use such reference sources for their assignment and research work.

A study conducted by David-West and Owate (2019) reference services and survey of users satisfaction in academic libraries. The study revealed that there is a significant relationship between reference services and users satisfaction.

Razaq and Olaleye (2017) conducted a study on availability and use of reference sources and services. The study revealed that majority of the respondents indicate that reference sources are highly available, accessible and adequate, except geographical sources and biographical sources that are not available, accessible and adequate.

The current study builds on the other studies of availability and use of reference sources in academic libraries.

## Research Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The study will not go beyond post graduate students using University of Port Harcourt library. The population of the study comprises all post graduate students totalling 1,264 in University of Port Harcourt. The simple random sampling technique was used in the study, giving every member of the population equal opportunity to be selected. The sample was 126 post graduate students which represent 10% of the entire population.

Instrument titled Availability and Utilization of Reference Sources in Academic Libraries Questionnaire (AURSALQ) was used for data collection. 24 items instrument developed by the researcher to measure the identified variables. The content validity was established by two experts in Guidance and Counseling Department. The reliability of the instrument was done by Cronbach Alpha Method. Availability coefficient value of 0.80 was obtained. This shows that the instrument was reliable and good for the study. A total of 126 questionnaire was administered by the researcher and two trained research assistants. At the end 118 instruments were retrieved representing 93.7 return rate. The research questions were answered with mean(x) and standard deviation while the hypotheses was tested using z test at 0.05 level of significance.

## Results

**Research Question One:** What are the level of availability and utilization of reference sources in academic libraries in Nigeria?

**Table 1: Mean scores of respondents on the level of availability of utilization of references sources in University of Port Harcourt Library.**

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Availability		Utilization		Mean Set	Rank Order	Decision
		$\bar{X}$	St.D	$\bar{X}$	St.D			
1.	Abstracts	3.09	0.56	3.03	0.36	3.06	7 <sup>th</sup>	Agreed
2.	Almanac	3.12	0.56	3.02	0.36	3.07	6 <sup>th</sup>	Agreed
3.	Atlases	3.02	0.57	2.98	0.37	3.00	8 <sup>th</sup>	Agreed
4.	Bibliographies	3.26	0.55	3.22	0.35	3.24	1 <sup>st</sup>	Agreed
5.	Dictionaries	3.07	0.57	3.17	0.35	3.12	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Agreed
6.	Directories	3.19	0.56	2.99	0.36	3.09	5 <sup>th</sup>	Agreed
7.	Encyclopedia	3.22	0.55	3.12	0.36	3.17	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Agreed
8.	Government publications	3.04	0.57	2.96	0.36	3.00	8 <sup>th</sup>	Agreed

9.	Handbooks	3.12	0.56	3.02	0.36	3.07	4 <sup>th</sup>	Agreed
10.	Indexes	3.02	0.57	2.98	0.37	3.00	8 <sup>th</sup>	Agreed
		3.14	0.56	3.06	0.36	3.09		Agreed

Table 1 describes the mean scores and standard deviation of the level of availability and utilization of reference sources in academic libraries. The respondents agreed on all the items with high mean scores greater than the criterion mean of 2.50 following the rank order from 1<sup>st</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>. The aggregate mean score of 3.09 explains that the reference sources viz abstracts, almanac, atlases, bibliographies, dictionaries, directories, encyclopedia, government publications, handbooks and indexes are available in University of Port Harcourt Library for effective utilization in the realization of stated educational goals.

**Research Question Two:** How often do the available reference sources are consulted and utilized in academic libraries in Nigeria?

**Table 2: Mean scores of often consulted reference sources and utilization in academic libraries.**

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Availability		Utilization		Mean Set	Rank Order	Decision
		$\bar{X}$	St.D	$\bar{X}$	St.D			
11.	Abstracts	3.19	0.56	3.07	0.36	3.13	3 <sup>rd</sup>	More often
12.	Almanac	2.19	0.65	1.99	0.49	2.09	8 <sup>th</sup>	Rarely
13.	Bibliographies	3.23	0.55	3.13	0.35	3.18	1 <sup>st</sup>	More often
14.	Atlases	2.01	0.62	2.09	0.48	2.05	10 <sup>th</sup>	Rarely
15.	Government publications	3.09	0.57	3.01	0.37	3.05	6 <sup>th</sup>	More often
16.	Directories	2.31	0.56	2.19	0.65	2.25	9 <sup>th</sup>	Rarely
17.	Dictionaries	3.14	0.56	3.10	0.36	3.12	4 <sup>th</sup>	More often
18.	Encyclopedia	3.14	0.56	3.16	0.35	3.15	2 <sup>nd</sup>	More often
19.	Handbooks	3.12	0.56	3.02	0.36	3.07	5 <sup>th</sup>	More often
20.	Indexes	3.02	0.57	2.98	0.37	3.00	7 <sup>th</sup>	More often
		2.84	0.57	2.77	0.41	2.81		More often

Table 2 describes the mean scores and standard deviation of often consulted reference sources and its utilization in University of Port Harcourt Library. The respondents on item 11, 13, 15, 17-20 with high mean scores greater than the criterion mean of 2.50 following the rank order from 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> and disagreed on item 12, 14 and 16 with low mean score of 2.09, 2.05 and 2.25 showing rarely consulted reference sources while items 11, 13, 15, 17-20 shows more often consulted reference sources and utilization in University of Port Harcourt Library.

**Research Question 3:** What are the challenges encountered when consulting reference sources in academic libraries in Nigeria?

**Table 3: Mean scores of ' challenges students encountered in consultation of reference sources in University of Port Harcourt Library.**

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Availability		Utilization		Mean Set	Rank Order	Decision
		$\bar{X}$	St.D	$\bar{X}$	St.D			
21.	Inability to understand the nature of reference sources	3.34	0.55	3.38	0.30	3.36	1 <sup>st</sup>	Agreed
22.	Inadequacy of reference sources	3.22	0.56	3.28	0.31	3.25	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Agreed
23.	Poor knowledge on how to find information from reference sources	3.12	0.57	3.08	0.36	3.10	4 <sup>th</sup>	Agreed
24.	Unable to use reference sources to solve information needs	3.15	0.56	3.19	0.34	3.17	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Agreed
		3.21	0.56	3.23	0.32	3.22		Agreed

Table 3 describes the mean scores and standard deviation of students' challenges in consultation of reference sources in University of Port Harcourt Library. The respondents agreed on all the items with high mean scores greater than the criterion mean of 2.50 following the rank order from 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup>. The aggregate mean score of 3.22 shows challenges students encountered, include: inability to understand the nature of reference sources, inadequacy of reference sources, poor knowledge on how to find information from reference sources and unable to use reference sources to solve information needs. As a result, the achievement of desired educational objectives aimed at learners' behavioural change is frustrated.

## Hypotheses

**H01:** There is no significant difference between the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) scores of the level of availability and utilization of reference sources in academic libraries.

**Table 4: z -test compilation on the variables under study**

Variable	N	$\bar{x}$	St.D	Df	P	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Reference sources	118	3.28	0.56	116	0.05	1.98	±1.96	Sign
Utilization		3.06	0.36					



The table presented  $z$  -test compilation on the variables under study with 1.98 as the calculated  $z$ -test which is above the critical  $z$ -test at 0.05 level of significance. This explained that the null hypothesis is rejected showing that the result is significant.

**H02:** There is no significant difference between the mean( $\bar{x}$ ) scores of often consulted reference sources and utilization in academic libraries in Nigeria.

**Table 5:  $z$  -test compilation on the variables under study**

Variable	N	$\bar{x}$	St.D	df	P	$z$ -cal	$z$ -crit	Decision
Often consulted reference sources	118	2.84	0.57	116	0.05	1.00	$\pm 1.96$	No Sign
Utilization		2.77	0.41					

The table presented  $z$  -test compilation on the variables under study with 1.00 as the calculated  $z$  -test which is below the critical  $z$  -test at 0.05 level of significance. This explained that the null hypothesis is accepted showing that the result is not significant.

**H03:** There is no significant difference between the mean( $\bar{x}$ ) scores of the challenges encountered when consulting reference sources and utilization in academic libraries in Nigeria.

**Table 6:  $z$  -test computation on the variables under study**

Variable	N	$\bar{x}$	St.D	df	P	$z$ -cal	$z$ -crit	Decision
Students' challenges in consultation	118	3.32	0.56	116	0.05	2.01	$\pm 1.96$	Sign
Utilization		3.23	0.32					

The table shows  $z$  -test computation on the variables under study with 2.01 as the calculated  $z$  -test which is above the critical  $z$  -test at 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that the null hypothesis is rejected explaining that the result is significant.

## **Discussion of Findings**

### **What are the level of availability and utilization of reference sources in academic libraries in Nigeria?**

The findings revealed that the level of availability and utilization of reference sources in University of Port Harcourt library include: abstracts, almanac, atlases, bibliographies, dictionaries, encyclopedia, government publications, handbooks and indexes which improve the teaching and learning process. The test of hypothesis one showed that there is a significant difference between the mean(x) scores of the level of availability and utilization of reference sources in academic libraries in Nigeria. In line with the findings Abdulahi and Manza(2014) believed that reference sources are goldmines of the reference section, the value is inestimable to users who need them to obtain relevant information.

Ogbuiyi (2015) endorsed in his study on availability and use of reference sources and services in Babcock University Library that reference sources are highly available, accessible and adequate, except yearbooks, bibliographies and biographies that are not available, accessible and adequate. The study of Adamodi (2015) agrees that students are aware of reference sources and its availability as well as accessibility but added that the role of use of reference sources is significantly low. However, Motiang, Wallis and Karodia(2014) in their study affirms that there is significant use of the library, its reference sources and services and users' satisfaction with the library operating hours, registration process and staff members. David-West and Owate(2019) in their study reference services and survey of users satisfaction in academic libraries in Rivers State" revealed that there is a significant relationship between reference services and users' satisfaction. It is important to note that a library that cannot meet the information needs of its users is moribund in information system and have lost its vitality, honour and attraction. For there to be a sound and quality service delivery there must be a sound and quality reference collection for users leading to effective teaching and learning process.

### **How often are the available reference sources consulted and utilized in academic libraries in Nigeria?**

The findings revealed that almanacs, atlases and directories are rarely consulted reference sources while abstracts, bibliographies, dictionaries, encyclopedias, government publications, handbooks, and indexes are more often consulted reference sources and utilization. The test of hypothesis two showed that there is no significant difference between the mean(x) scores of often consulted reference sources and utilization in academic libraries in Nigeria. In line with the findings, Ogunniyi, Efosa and Sheji(2013) found out that majority of library users have good understanding of what reference sources are and that encyclopedia and dictionaries have higher rates of usage than other reference sources in the library. The scholars maintained that patrons use such reference sources for their assignments and research work. The study of Onifade and Sowole (2011) agrees

that encyclopedia's and dictionaries are mostly used by students. This is why (according to Sohail et al, 2012) guidance in the use of library resources and services are necessary to help students meet their information needs.

Razaq and Olaleye (2017) confirmed that reference sources are highly available, accessible and adequate, except geographical sources, biographical, almanacs and directories sources that are not available, accessible and adequate. This means that for effective operation of the library system at every point in time, all the reference sources (not some or few) need to be available and accessed for effective utilization aimed at the attainment of coveted educational objectives.

### **The challenges encountered when consulting references sources in academic libraries in Nigeria.**

The findings revealed that the challenges encountered when consulting reference sources in academic libraries in Nigeria include: inability to understand the nature of reference sources, inadequacy of reference sources, poor knowledge on how to find information from reference sources, and unable to use reference sources to solve information needs which adversely affect the teaching and learning process. The test of hypothesis three showed that there is a significant difference between the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) scores of the challenges encountered when consulting reference sources and utilization in academic libraries in Nigeria. In line with this findings, Ajidahun(2004) advise libraries to provide adequate and relevant reference sources in order to meet the information needs of users. However, the scholar maintained that most academic libraries in Nigeria fails to adequately provide for their users because of poor funding, poor acquisition of reference sources, poor reference services and low utilization of available reference sources. This no doubt hinder ability of the user to understand the nature of reference sources, adequacy of reference sources, good knowledge on how to find information from reference sources and ability to use reference sources to solve learners information needs. The study of Usman (2005) affirmed that libraries that fail to acquire, circulate and make available reference sources will end up sophocating users' information retrieval and utilization leading to poor and chaotic teaching and learning process. The librarians should be in a good position to guide the users in the accessing of the available reference sources so as to overcome the inherent challenges encountered during consulting reference sources in University of Port Harcourt Library.

### **Conclusion**

The importance of reference sources cannot be overemphasized in academic environment. It is highly beneficial and indispensable for students to achieve their educational outcome. There exist a significant difference in the level of availability and utilization of reference sources as well as the challenges encountered by students during consultation of reference sources in academic libraries in Nigeria. For effective operation of the library system, all the reference sources need to be available and reference librarians should create awareness and guide students for effective utilization geared towards effective learning process.

## Recommendation

1. There should be a digital platform that will help librarians to engage with users in various channels such as instant messaging, WhatsApp, and online chat.
2. Librarians should ensure that reference sources are regularly updated in order to make them relevant all times.
3. Librarians should develop an information marketing strategy to create awareness of reference sources, this will help for maximum utilization of reference sources.
4. Librarians should ensure that all reference sources are available to users for effective utilization.

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